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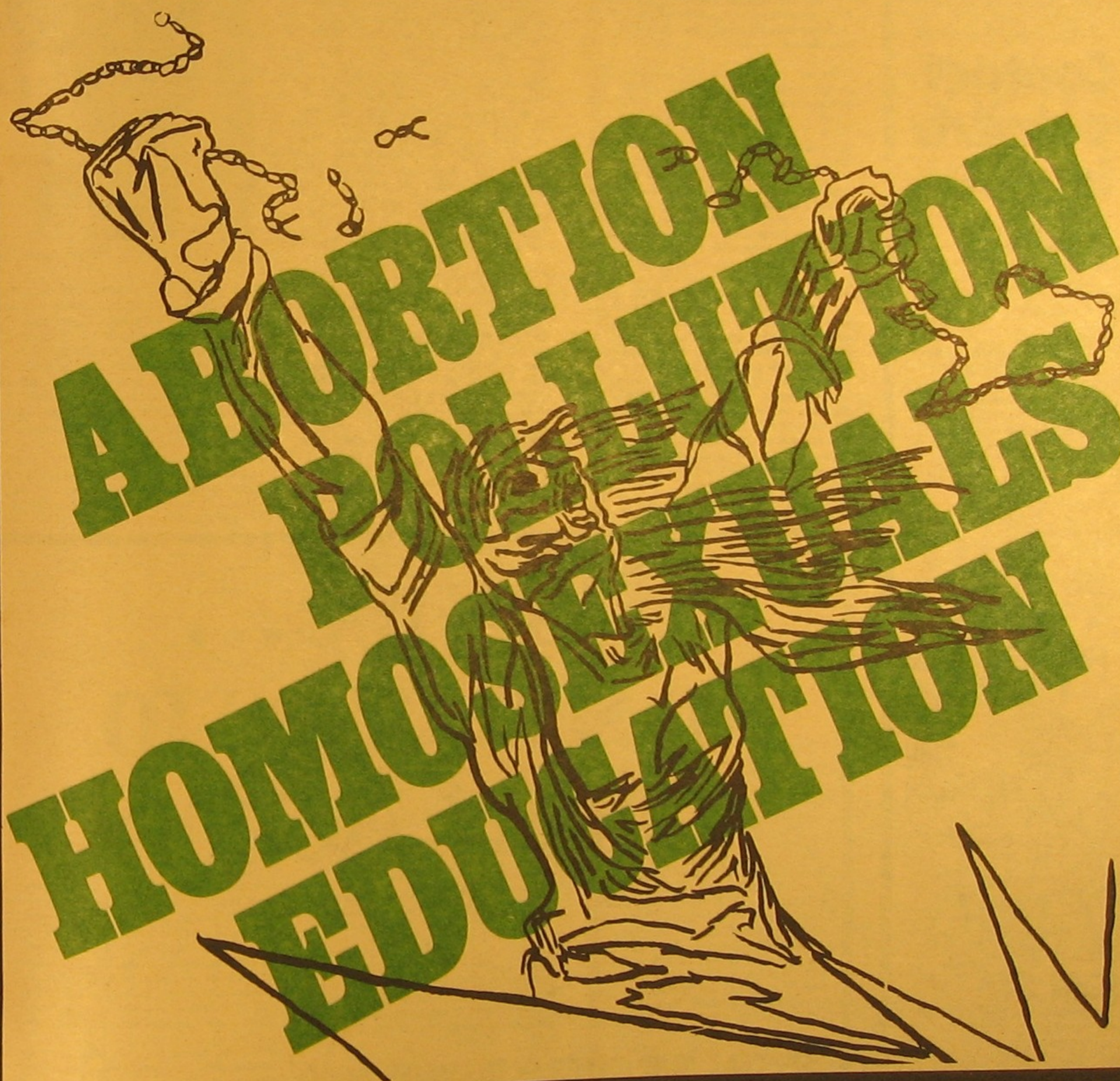
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What will Labor do about



Labor must fight for socialist solutions!

WHY SOCIALISTS SHOULD SUPPORT THE LABOR PARTY

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE ELECTION POLICY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY?

BY JOHN PERCY

In a recent issue of "Tribune", the Communist Party of Australia published a 4 page section setting out its policies for the coming Federal elections. As in previous years, they are running their own candidates in a handful of electorates, and also as in previous years, they are displaying the basic inadequacies of their political programme, especially as regards the Labor Party and the present political consciousness and likely future development of the Australian working class.

Throughout its history, through the many twists and turns of its political line, the CPA has failed to understand the nature of the Australian Labor Party - its dual nature; on the one hand its working class base and its direct links with the unions marking it as a historically progressive step forward for the Australian working class in the direction of independent political action, and on the other hand its reactionary, bourgeois leadership and reformist policies, which are obstacles on the road to the construction of a mass revolutionary party that will be essential for the victory of socialism in Australia.

A failure to recognise these basic facts, central to an understanding of the Australian political scene, means that any subsequent analysis will inevitably be faulty. As its slogans for the elections, the CPA puts forward - "Vote CPA for Action and Social Change" and "Vote to End Liberal-CP Regime". Unchanged from previous years, these slogans are of course the natural consequences of the CPA's incorrect analysis and method, and indicate that whether the claims of some CPA members that the CPA is breaking from its Stalinist past are true or not, one thing is certain and that is that they aren't evolving in a revolutionary Marxist direction.

It is essential that socialists give unconditional support to the Labor Party as against the capitalist parties in this election, not merely urge a vote against the present government. The working class, in its vast majority seeing the Labor Party as its party, will not take kindly to such obvious sleight of hand tricks from the CPA. As for voting for the CPA, all seven candidates will of course once again lose their deposits, and even the effects on the most advanced sections of the working class are likely to be negative in response to CPA candidates. It will certainly be the case for anyone with a memory of the 1961 election where the preferences of a CPA candidate "drifted" to the bourgeois candidate and lost the seat for the ALP, saving the Liberal Country Party government!

As well as refusing to support the Labor Party against the capitalist parties, a result of the CPA's blindness to the first aspect of the ALP, its working class base, the CPA also cops out of the struggle arising from the second aspect of the ALP, its reactionary leadership. They refuse to carry out the fight inside the Labor Party for socialist policies, against the present right-wing leadership that will betray the interests of the workers. The CPA's present policy cuts them off from the masses of workers who still have illusions in that leadership, and things are not going to be altered by standing Laurie Aaronson and half a dozen others in the election against Labor candidates.

What could be the reasons behind this policy on the part of the CPA? Could it be that they're just muddled? This explanation shouldn't be dismissed out of hand as just a joke. A good case could be made out for it. The disunity, uncertainty, and lack of a political line on the part of the CPA becomes more obvious week by week. Having rejected the validity of an international organisation,

they seem to be moving in the direction of rejecting a united organisation on a national level as well, with their different policy, often contradictory. Similarly, their newspaper "Tribune" seems lost for a line, with no guarantee that what they say in one issue will not be contradicted in the next issue or even on the next page. Their Sydney University group one week carries an authorisation by Trotsky, another week carries a weak smear against 400 different brands of "Trotskyites".

However, for all this, the causes of their rotten political line go deeper. Basically, they are unable to apply the Marxist method in analysing society and political phenomena. When the Australian CPA was bound to the CPSU they had no need of an independent political analysis of society - their line was merely handed down from abroad and automatically accepted. Having out themselves adrift organisationally from the CPSU after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, they have been wandering around without a rudder, but inertia has kept them on their previous course in this case, standing their own candidates. Here is a real example of organisational sectarianism, with the CPA pushing itself forward against the interests of the working class.

The CPA's election statement urges their supporters to give second preferences to either the ALP or the Australia Party, making no distinction at all between them. The Australia Party of course is a thoroughly bourgeois party, and in no circumstances should socialists support them electorally, either on their own, or in any sort of electoral



Union prisoners during 1891 shearers' strike. This strike gave impetus to the formation of the Labor Party.

bloc. The CPA's inability to make a class analysis of these parties has led them to this position.

The same causes have led the Marxists and many ultra-left groupings to make the same mistake. In fact in some cases it was not merely a question of equating the ALP and the Australia Party, of regarding them both as capitalist parties, but of actually supporting the Australia Party against the ALP!

On the other hand, the Healyite grouping, the Socialist Labour League, around the paper Labour Press, while being formally correct in their recognition of the dual nature of the ALP and the necessity to urge the working class to vote Labor are very inconsistent and unsure in the application of this understanding in practice. In fact, this political tendency had its origin in Britain 2 decades ago in a struggle for a correct attitude to the British Labor Party in opposition to a policy of sectarian abstention. Since they

broke with the Fourth International, however, this tendency has degenerated in a sectarian direction on a whole number of other political questions as well as in relation to the ALP. In a pamphlet published by the Fourth International in 1967, "Marxism vs. Ultraleftism", by Ernest Germaine, the mode of operation of the British Healyites is described as follows:-

"The Healy tendency started out with a clearcut conception about the way to build a revolutionary mass left wing in the Labor Party. Today, it has tacitly abandoned this conception, without self-criticism, and without replacing it openly by another one. It shouts all the more stridently about the need to build a revolutionary leadership, the more it appears to ignore the concrete ways and means of building such a leadership.

"The absence of any fresh, clearly stated concept of how to build a revolutionary mass party in Britain does not mean, however, that no concept exists around which activity is carried out, activity pragmatically expressing a view that is neither clearly formulated nor fully thought out. In actual fact, the SLL acts as though it were expressing the famous concept of "third period" Stalinism; i.e., that it is possible to build a revolutionary leadership not from within the Labor Party but from without by systematically intervening in working-class struggles and picking up militant workers who have become disillusioned with the official leadership (which is fully justified) and with the official organisation (which is much less justified, as long as 95 percent of the

very peculiar emphasis. Since they can only have one point for A, they can't treat both Aborigines and Abortion - since Z is a rather rare letter they end up supporting the reactionary Zero Population Growth line, and so on.

More fundamental than this, however, is that they fail to put forward transitional demands, on such important issues as unemployment, for example where it is essential to advance slogans for a sliding scale of hours, i.e. all the work to be divided up equally amongst the whole working class, with no loss of pay, and a sliding scale of wages, i.e. all wages to be adjusted automatically to any rise in the cost of living.

On top of this, their programme is almost wholly restricted in its horizons to Australia. No internationalist perspectives are put forward, questions of foreign policy are treated very cursorily. Vietnam does not rate a separate mention, and no mention at all is made of the CPA's position in regard to the workers' states of China, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe etc, and its attitude to the bureaucracies there.

Their programme also makes much of the foreign takeover of Australian companies. Although not taken to the absurd lengths of our local Maoists, this attitude must be thoroughly condemned by socialists. The Australian working class has no interests whatsoever in protecting our local capitalists from foreign capitalists. It is the duty of socialists to encourage the international solidarity of the working class of the world, and to fight any chauvinist sentiments that are fostered by our local capitalist class and believed all too readily by many workers. With Australia as an imperialist and colonialist country in its own right, this task becomes all the more important.

Before concluding this brief survey of the CPA's policy for the coming election, a final note on their emphasis on "action". "Vote CPA for Action and Social Change", runs their slogan, and continually through their programme they stress "action", "people's action", "action for really radical changes" etc. Unfortunately there is a real discrepancy between their verbal desire for "action" and their actual practice in many cases, especially when their organisational sectarianism shines through. A recent example of this was the national secondary students strike on September 20, where over 5000 students demonstrated around Australia, surely an example of action around real issues. Yet the CPA gave very little support to this action, attacked it in one article in "Tribune", and practically ignored it in their press even after it was a huge success. In fact, it was obvious prior to the action that word was circulating in CPA circles at least amongst the leadership, that the strike was merely "an SYA front", "outside intervention" etc, that hopefully would fall.

Thus in such a politically important time as an election period, the CPA is exposed as not only theoretically bankrupt, and politically incorrect on a whole range of questions, but lacking in the field of action also, where verbally it is trying to put so much emphasis.

For the rudderless CPA to chart a correct course in future, it will have to adopt a revolutionary Marxist programme, a programme that the Fourth International has left intact and developed since the time of Lenin and Trotsky, and it will have to break completely the ties with its Stalinist past. We don't think that will be possible for the CPA - the ballast of past crimes and mistakes is too heavy, and the dead weight of an inactive and politically burnt out membership cannot be jettisoned. However, hopefully, some of the comrades in the CPA will be able to break loose in a revolutionary direction, and for them we hope that our criticism above will be seen as fraternal.

workers continue to adhere to the organisation).

After initial confusion, and an orientation for a time towards the ALP, the local Healyites have settled into the method of operations described above. Their actual practice is in contradiction with their analysis of the ALP and their slogan of Labor to Power. Their sectarianism prevents them from struggling to build an alternative class struggle left wing in the Labour movement. Their precondition for any united action is that you support their weird political fantasies.

Thus both the CPA and the Healyites have this in common, a sectarian attempt to project themselves as an alternative leadership of the working class from outside the Labor Party rather than inside.

As well as being wrong on the crucial question of the Labor Party, the CPA is also wrong on many of the particular policy points it puts forward. Its gimmicky attempt to have a point for every letter of the alphabet gives their platform,

LABOR TO POWER! FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST POLICIES!